Beyond the Page: Reimagining Literacy Across Media, Cultures, and Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

The Spring 2025 issue of the *Georgia Journal of Literacy*, themed "Beyond the Page: Reimagining Literacy Across Media, Cultures, and Classrooms," challenges, expands, and reimagines what literacy means in modern classrooms. This issue explores a mix of literacy practices, from digital texts and AI tools to dialect use and blending across different genres and fields. The opening research articles invite readers to consider early literacy through the lens of multimodality, social-emotional development, and teacher identity. A bridging article explores how AI can personalize literacy instruction for students with autism, and the teaching-focused pieces offer classroom-ready strategies that celebrate linguistic diversity and integrate literature with science instruction through blended genres. These contributions together illustrate how literacy is not confined to the printed page but lived, embodied, and continuously reshaped by the media we use, the identities we affirm, and the worlds we seek to understand.

What if we stopped asking what literacy is and started asking what it could become? The Spring 2025 issue of the *Georgia Journal of Literacy*, "Beyond the Page: Reimagining Literacy Across Media, Cultures, and Classrooms," invites our readers to ask that very question. In this issue, the contributors treat literacy as a living, evolving practice, one that stretches across disciplines, takes shape through new media, honors diverse linguistic and cultural identities, and responds to the changing contours of classrooms and communities.

We publish this issue at a moment of disruption and possibility. The rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI), persistent debates over book access and language use, and the continued expansion of what counts as a "text" challenge us as educators to rethink how literacy is taught and why it matters (Grote-Garcia et al., 2025; Kalantzis & Cope, 2025). Each article in this issue redefines literacy from a different vantage point, whether through the lens of digital storytelling, socio-emotional learning (SEL), science integration, linguistic justice, or neurodiverse inclusion. The issue begins with research-based inquiries into emerging definitions and practices of literacy, moves into a research-practitioner bridge piece focused on AI and neurodiverse learners, and concludes with practical teaching tips grounded in culturally responsive, interdisciplinary instruction. Together, these pieces ask us not to abandon the page but to move beyond it. These contributions also remind us how we can continue to shape, question, and grow as literacy educators and advocates in a world that's constantly changing.

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Research Articles: Literacy as Digital, Emotional, and Personal Practice

The issue opens with three research articles that rethink the core of what literacy is and does, including its tools, its purposes, and its practitioners. In "Very Mindful, Very Multimodal: Digital Texts' Affordances for Emergent Readers," Emily Colleen Cobb examines how digital texts are reshaping early literacy. Drawing from current scholarship in new literacies and multiliteracies, Cobb challenges the assumption that today's children are digital natives naturally equipped to navigate digital content. She argues that digital texts require their own forms of strategic reading, interpretation, and meaning making and that these need to be taught explicitly. Instead of treating digital texts as extras, Cobb encourages educators to view them as active, engaging spaces where young readers can explore, create, and make sense of what they read in fresh ways.

In "Fostering Social-Emotional Learning in Children's Books," Dr. Forrest R. Parker III and Dr. Jodi Cronin turn to picturebooks as catalysts for developing social-emotional competencies. Using the widely recognized Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework, Parker and Cronin conduct a quantitative analysis of contemporary children's literature to assess both the presence and the quality of SEL themes. Their findings suggest that effective SEL integration depends not only on content but on how that content is delivered through compelling narratives, strong visuals, and thoughtfully designed characters that model empathy, regulation, and responsible decision-making.

Dr. Matt Sroka's "Teachers as Readers: Examining the Personal Reading Lives of English Educators" offers a more inward-looking perspective. Through a participatory action research design, Sroka follows four English teachers as they reflect on their personal reading habits, histories, and identities. The study reveals how these inner literate lives shape classroom practice in subtle but important ways, from the texts teachers choose to the culture of reading they create. Ultimately, Sroka suggests that fostering engaged student readers begins with teachers who themselves live as readers and who are willing to reflect on and share that identity.

Bridging Research and Practice: Personalized Possibilities with Technology

Next, Alexis Lawton's "Leveraging AI to Enhance Literacy in Students with ASD" offers an appropriate bridge between research and application, exploring how generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, Otter.AI, and image generators, can provide personalized literacy supports for neurodiverse learners. Drawing from her experiences as a speech-language pathologist, Lawton illustrates how these tools can scaffold vocabulary, comprehension, and writing development in ways that honor student strengths and needs. Instead of seeing AI as something that replaces human teaching, she presents it as a helpful, adaptable tool for inclusive learning and one that needs to be used thoughtfully and responsibly. Lawton's classroom-based insights echo the broader theoretical implications of scholars like Kalantzis and Cope (2025), who position generative AI as a new medium of literacy that invites educators to rethink reading and writing as dynamic, design-driven practices shaped by both human input and machine output.

Teaching in Action: Language, Science, and Story

The final section of the issue turns to classroom-ready practices that celebrate language diversity and expand the possibilities of interdisciplinary literacy instruction. In "Teaching with a Twist: Embracing Appalachian (and Other) Dialects—Y'all Ready for This?" Dr. Melissa Comer advocates for bringing marginalized dialects, particularly Appalachian English, into the heart of English language arts instruction. Calling on personal narrative and cultural linguistics, Comer makes a strong push for honoring students' "first voices" as legitimate and valuable. Activities

like student-created dialect glossaries and digital storytelling model an asset-based approach that affirms linguistic identity while deepening engagement with language, literature, and critical inquiry.

One of our biggest contributors, Dr. William Bintz, supplies two practical pieces to this issue that extend the reach of literacy into the sciences through the innovative use of blended genres. In "Combining Picturebooks and Poetry as Blended Genres to Teach Life Science," Bintz shares examples and strategies, such as the H-Map, for helping students connect poetic and narrative texts with life science concepts. In the companion piece, "Combining Picturebooks and Poetry as Blended Genres to Teach Earth and Space Science," he expands this approach to include earth and space content, introducing instructional tools like the Z-Map and interlocking spheres of intertextuality. These pieces provide K–8 educators with imaginative ways to integrate literacy into STEM as a bridge across disciplines.

Takeaways: Connection, Complexity, and Possibility

Together, these seven articles offer a rich and varied look at what teaching and promoting literacy means by highlighting the different ways literacy advocacy shows up in classrooms, communities, and everyday life. We see literacy reimagined:

- As emotional and interpersonal, through children's SEL texts, dialect affirmation, and teacher identity;

- As multimodal and digital, through screen-based reading, generative AI, and the layering of genres and tools;

- And as interdisciplinary, where literacy lives not just in novels and essays, but in science, culture, and new media landscapes.

The literacy scholars and educators who add their voices to this issue do not accept the status quo. Instead, they challenge us to blur the lines between genres, subjects, modes, and traditions to build more expansive, equitable, and imaginative literacy spaces. This issue adds layers to our evolving definition of literacy by expanding and reshaping the definition itself, and it calls on us to move beyond the page, not to leave it behind, but to let it lead us into new spaces of meaning. In doing so, this issue reframes literacy as a generative, connective act shaped as much by curiosity and design as by rules and convention.

References

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